

## **The Sweet And The Sour (On Hiatus) by Mouthbreather (scalding\_coolness)**

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Additional Warnings Apply, And Hills, Angst, Angst and Feels, Beaching, Derry, Exploring, F/F, F/M, Fluff, Fluff and Humor, Gen, High School Trips, Hiking, Holding Hands, Humour, Mild Strong Language, Senior year, Sharing a Room, Short, Sick Character, Swimming, shit happens

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Mr. Mayfield, Nancy Wheeler, Neil Hargrove, Steve Harrington, Susan Hargrove, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Eleven | Jane Hopper & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Mild Mileven, Will Byers & Eleven | Jane & Dustin Henderson & Maxine Mayfield & Lucas Sinclair & Mike Wheeler, Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

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**Summary:**

It was one bad thing happening after another because it wasn't shit hitting the fan, but the fan itself falling and her end of school trip ended up being a disaster, but *couldn't some disasters be beautiful?*

## 1. i. the wrong hand

### Author's Note:

I'm having trouble with my other fics and so, this is what I do.

I hope you guys like it! This is a two part chapter and (spoiler) the next one is quite eventful!

### Summary for the Chapter:

The hand she had just laced her fingers with fit hers a little too perfectly to be Mike's.

"Remember, no drinking and no wandering," Hopper's deep raspy voice came through the speaker.

"I know, dad. I won't be stupid," she said back.

There were still a few rules she had to follow, even though they had changed through there years. At first it had been 'keep the curtains drawn' and now it was a 'don't drink'.

Not that she had ever done so, but she couldn't blame him. The first time she had accidentally drank beer thinking it was soda had made every hanging picture and clock in their house lean a little more towards the left.

And no one else had looked out for her the way he had, even though sometimes his 'looking out' felt like suffocation and he got a little too protective, she knew, understood now better than ever, that he meant only the best.

"All right, kiddo. Don't have too much fun," he drawled, the playfulness in his voice bringing a smile to her lips.

"Oh, I'll have so much fun without you," she murmured into the speaker teasingly. "Bye, dad. Love you."

"Love you too, kid. Oh and don--"

"Yeah, yeah I remember!" she called out, chuckling before hanging up the telephone and shaking her head knowingly as she walked off to join her friends, ready make the most out the trip.

She didn't know when she would see all of them like that again, alone together.

The air was crispy that morning– not the kind that turned her breath into steam as soon as it left her mouth, but the one that felt refreshing as it whipped through her curls, the one that felt somehow richer, airier than the air usually felt. She took in a deep breath, wanting to feel that wave of liveliness again and smiled at the pleasant sensation as she walked alongside Mike and Will.

"I love autumn," Will breathed out from beside her, rousing her from her musings.

She glanced at him briefly, immediately knowing her face matched the peacefulness that was etched to his.

"Me too," she murmured, hearing the serenity in her voice as she said it.

"I wish I'd borrowed Jonathan's camera," Will stated, remorse dripping from his eyes as he looked around the field.

She chuckled at his words, following his gaze as she laced her fingers with Mike's cold ones.

The trees were indeed a sight to see. A mix of orange, brown and yellow hued leaves littered across the grass and hanging down branches that had gone almost bare. How could something so close to dying be capable of looking that beautiful? It all seemed implausible to her.

Leaves shouldn't look so exquisite when they were dying.

"I wish *I* owned a camera," Will muttered, almost whining and rousing another cackle out of her.

He gave her a dirty look at that and yet his eyes only had softness shining through them.

The sound of Dustin's boisterous laugh made her glance back at the boy wondering what joke she had missed out on, yet again.

"This is the best thing ever," he remarked before stumbling because of the snickers that racked through his body.

"What's going on?" she called out quizzically, a smile already on her face despite not knowing the cause of his amusement.

She did not miss the wide grin Lucas sent her way before muttering, "Why don't you tell her, Dusty?"

She shook her head when said boy burst into another fit of uncontrollable chortles, ignoring him and turned to Mike instead, knowing he would tell her the joke she wasn't in on yet, but she got her answer before even asking because her eyes never met Mike's and instead, she found herself looking into one's akin to an ocean.

*Oh.*

She didn't know why it hadn't occurred to her before that the palm she had been unconsciously rubbing her thumb over lacked the familiar roughness she was used to or that the fingers curled around hers didn't feel as long or that the hand she had just laced her fingers with fit hers a little too perfectly to be Mike's.

*Oh.*

She retracted her hand from Max's immediately as blood rushed to her cheeks furiously. She was caught too off guard to even hear the guffaws from behind her or notice Max's crimsoned cheeks as her eyes darted around awkwardly.

"S-sorry. Um-where's Mike?" she mumbled clumsily, but before anyone could answer, a pair of hands suddenly obscured her vision and her hands darted up in protest to pry the palms away from her eyes.

"Here," he whispered, the smile so obvious in his voice.

She smiled involuntarily, pulling his hands away as she turned to him. "Where were you?"

He smiled wider at her question, "I forgot my jacket in the bus—" and smirked before continuing, "Missed me?"

A gag interrupted her before she could answer. "Just wait a few more minutes please, we'll get you two a room. I promise," Dustin muttered dramatically with his nose crinkled up in displeasure.

She smiled when Mike rolled his eyes at the boy's idiotic antics.

"I hate to be the killjoy, but I overheard Miss Mallory say boys and girls have separate dorms," Lucas piped in, sounding not too pleased with the information.

"As expected," she heard Max scoff and glanced at the girl, feeling her face redden once more with embarrassment.

She shook her head as if to shake the thoughts away. It was a mistake.

Mistakes happened.

"I still don't know my room number," Mike murmured as he casually draped an arm over her shoulder.

"Neither do I," she replied, smiling up at him afterwards.

"Let's find out then, shall we?" he smiled goofily, rubbing his hand up and down her shoulder out of habit as they made their way past the trees, towards the reception where all the teachers were gathered at.

She still couldn't fully comprehend how quickly highschool had ended. It still felt as though just yesterday she had stepped foot into a classroom for the first time, hesitation and insecurity gripping every fibre in her body. The first year had been.. grueling at best. Initially, the thought of not having one of her friends beside her had bothered her more than she would ever let on. There was so much she hadn't known back then and even now there was so much she still didn't, but she had gotten through it.

All of it with these people beside her that she loved with all of her heart. Mike who had been the first to give her a glimpse of the

feeling of being home. He felt like shade under the scorching heat of the sun and then there was Will who made her feel the most comfortable she ever had had around a person and Dustin, a goof who never seized to amuse her and Lucas, always acting like a protective older brother -all in good nature and even Max who she knew would always have her back even if they weren't anything more than mere acquaintances.

And Joyce who gave hugs that felt like Terry's arms around her and Hopper. *Hopper, the best thing to ever happen to her.*

She never could have imagined even in her wildest dreams to ever have a place and people that she could call home or see anything more than grey walls and cringe worthy bright lights. And there were still some days when she woke up a little bit more out of it than usual where finding herself in her bed and surrounded by pretty lilac walls left her feeling so astonished.

Her reality had become just so surreal for her to believe without a hitch that it wasn't all just a dream.

But then, could she be blamed really?

A loud clap brought her back to her surroundings and she blinked, clearing her head as she looked towards where the sound had come from.

"And she can hear!" Dustin grinned, his hands gesturing towards her in an overly dramatic manner.

She rolled her eyes albeit with a smile, shaking her head at him.

"Hey, you okay?" Mike asked with his forehead scrunched up.

"Yes, sorry. Did you ask me something?" she lifted her hand, running it across his forehead and smoothening out those lines of worry.

He smiled at her, clearing his throat and stuffing his hands in his pockets before answering, "Yeah, you can choose your roommate apparently, but we're a bit late for that so there aren't many options left except you know, all of us."

"You wouldn't mind sharing a room with Max, would you?" he asked

then, before she could answer– "because the only other options are Marla or.. Stacey," he continued, considerately.

She crinkled her nose, getting reminded of her first year at school. All those times the two gave her advice she hadn't asked for and expected her to follow them around like some lost puppy, making friends with only the popular kids or the ones that looked at them with nothing, but lust, which she'd learnt very later, that she found quite disgusting.

To put it simply, it had been a nightmare. "No, thank you. I prefer Max."

"Thought so," he grinned knowingly at her before walking off towards the shorter boy, a sheet of paper in his hand. "Hey Will, we're good to go!"

She found herself a few minutes later with a different kind of respect in her heart for four boys in particular as she climbed the last step of the godawful flight of stairs and breathed in a much needed breath of relief.

The sound of Dustin's voice had her glancing behind at the four boys, each carrying a suitcase in their arms, including hers like the gentlemen they were. "Lucas, I want Zeppelin playing at my funeral, you hear me?"

"Oh my god, Dustin, you're such a baby," Max retorted, readjusting her grip on the bag her and Dustin were carrying to divide the weight.

*Her* bag, she realised and held in her chuckle when she understood why.

Some *gentlemen* they were.

"I'm holding the heavier side, mind you," The curly haired boy muttered bitterly.

"Oh? And how come it weighs more?" Max rebuffed breathlessly, annoyance dripping from voice

"It's where—" A pant—"all the goodness is," He replied, climbing up the last step and dropping the bag immediately with the others following.

The redhead said nothing in answer, opting to catch her breath instead with both her hands on her knees.

The sight made her feel a bit guilty, but one look at Dustin's puffed up red cheeks had her grinning like a Cheshire cat.

She wiped the grin off of her face before calling out and pointing at her bag, "Uh, Dusty, I need that in my room."

The boy looked up at her, looking confused before realisation dawned on his face and a scowl took over.

"Yeah, Dustin. She'll even tip nicely," Max piped in from a few steps away as she straightened up.

The boy glared at the two of them mutely before Lucas came up and put an arm around his shoulder, "These girls bothering you, sir?"

He winked at her.

She couldn't hold in her laugh anymore and burst into an uncontrollable one, much like Dustin had on the field with Max and Lucas joining afterwards.

"What is it, pick on Dustin day?" The curly haired boy muttered sourly, shrugging Lucas' arm off of his shoulder as Mike and Will finally joined them.

"Yeah and there's more to come—" Mike flashed the four of them a mischievous grin before lifting his hand up and dangling a set of keys, "but for now we have rooms to go to."

"Why the rush?" she asked curiously, not wanting the moment to come to an end so suddenly.

"We've got one— no, close to two hours before we have to go down again. They're taking us hiking," Will informed from beside Mike, his lips stretched into a small smile.

Lucas whistled appreciatively, "Awesome."



"Hiking?" Dustin repeated disapprovingly followed by a groan from Max.

"Okay?" Mike let out, looking at the complaining duo with raised eyebrows.

"Look, Dustin's just a sloth—" Max gestured at the boy.

"Excuse me?!" he interrupted, looking affronted.

"But how am I supposed to skate on a fucking hill?" she finished, voice laced with frustration, completely ignoring the glare that Dustin was shooting her.

They all chuckled, even Dustin, as annoyed as he was and the redhead flipped all of them off, muttering a dismissive 'whatever' before snatching a key from Mike's hand and bounding towards the rooms.

Mike smirked at the girl's annoyance, looking down at the set of keys in his hand before his smirk disappeared.

"Hey, that's my key!" he started, rushing after the fierce redhead as they all followed.

A bittersweet smile played at her lips as she walked towards the rooms.

She would miss *this*.

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## 2. ii. the downfall

### Summary for the Chapter:

"A bug bit me."

"Newsflash. Want me to call you an ambulance?"

### Notes for the Chapter:

Enjoy the fluff and fun while it lasts because I just found out today that I'm really cruel.

This is for the twelve people who left kudos on the last chapter!

It turned out, two hours wasn't a long amount time– or it was, but had passed all too quickly.

She ran a hand over her forehead, pushing her curls away as she climbed up the rocky ground.

Hiking wasn't exactly an activity she would refer to as 'fun', but if it meant some quality time spent with her friends, she could bear through it for a while longer.

"Guys, can we really not ditch?" Max asked for the umpteenth time as she readjusted her grip on her skateboard.

She didn't know why the redhead had even brought it along, but perhaps she was really convinced that they would agree to go through with her ridiculous idea of ditching hiking and exploring Derry instead.

Hopper's words rang through her head at the thought as a reminder and she shook her head, a slight pout forming on her face.

No, hiking was their only option or at the very least, hers.

"Come on, Max. It's not that bad," Lucas looked back at the redhead, a grin plastered on his lips as he scratched at this camo bandana.

She was a little daunted by the boy's enthusiasm. He had gone all out with hiking boots and camo pants on and even a thin slender stick to shoo away 'the monkeys' as he had put it.

She looked around at all five of her friends, noticing the not too pleased expressions on their face ranging from mild exhaustion to downright fuming.

From the looks of it, Lucas was also the only one enjoying with his face pulled into a cheerful grin.

How..? She did not know.

"I never said it's bad, but skateboarding is cooler. And so is exploring," Max rebuffed as she kicked a stone out of her way.

"Hop would cut my ear off if he found out," Mike piped in from the front, his eyes falling upon her.

She chuckled at that, knowing what he was referring to, "You know I wouldn't let him, just like I didn't the last time."

"I trust that, but I don't want to take my chances," he grinned playfully. "My ears matter."

Dustin groan interrupted them as he stumbled over yet another rock, "I can't believe this is my life now."

She looked at him amusedly.

Max hadn't been wrong earlier, he really was a sloth.

"I have climbed this hill and now, I will die upon it," he muttered sourly, seeming to talk to himself as he kicked the pebble down the hill.

"Shut up, it's only been about twenty minutes," Lucas cut in, frowning at the curly haired boy's exaggeration.

"Twenty? It's only been twenty minutes?!" he repeated incredulously, managing to look even more miserable than before. "Woe is me," he muttered then with his shoulders slouched.

"Oh no, woe is me for having to deal with this shit." Max called out, looking about ready to turn the other way.

"And I thought I was a *loser*," Will spoke up, his eyes crinkling with mirth.

She chuckled alongside Mike and Lucas as they all ignored the two pairs of eyes glaring at them.

"Dustin, you're my only real *friend*, you know?" Max cut in as she leaned into the curly haired boy and threw an arm around his shoulder.

The unexpected weight had him stumbling and she saw his foot lodge against an exceptionally large rock before he went tumbling down, dragging Max behind him as he did.

"Omph!"

The two fell atop one another; a mess of limbs as all four of them stopped short and burst into unrestrained guffaws.

"Get off! You're crushing my spleen!" Max screeched, her hand hitting his arm repeatedly.

"You don't even know where your spleen is— ow!"

The redhead continued her merciless onslaught, ignoring the boy's pleas as he struggled to untangle himself from the redhead and get up. "Max sto— ow! I fucking hate you all bystanders!"

"Let's get him off before she murders him," Lucas nudged Mike's arm, his body still racking with unconcealed snickers.

The rest of the hill walking passed without any more incidents and yet, she didn't stop laughing every other minute until her belly started to hurt and it almost felt as though she was going to barf and Dustin didn't stop telling them all how he was never going hiking again even when they were on their way back to the hotel.

She had thought that was going to be the only mishaps they would encounter that day, but then, she had the tendency to be terribly

wrong about a lot of things.

...

It was sometime past 11 when she closed her eyes, letting the uninteresting magazine drop from her hands as she lied back on the bed. The size was quite comfortable, more than enough for one person and the mattress was soft too, but even at that it wasn't *her* bed.

She had claimed the one by the window as soon as her and Max had entered the room, something about being able to see the sky whilst falling asleep put her at ease.

The other girl hadn't protested, saying she didn't care as long as she got some peaceful sleep.

The indifference in the girl's voice had been apparent and she hadn't been able to help herself, but notice it ever since they had gotten back. The lack of energy was a bit jarring since she was so used to the redhead's fierce and energetic persona, even if they weren't that great of friends.

She was almost asleep when the sound of a door opening made her open her eyes as Max emerged from the bathroom, turning the light off as she did. The redhead had her hair up in a towel with an oversized shirt and sweatpants on. She looked on curiously as the redhead wiped her feet on a towel before exiting the bathroom.

Their eyes met soon enough and Max stared back at her before frowning. "What? I don't like getting the floor wet."

She cleared her throat, shaking her head slightly. "You're dressed," she pointed out.

The redhead trudged past the door, glancing at her as she did so. "Uh, yeah..? Where else would I get dressed?"

"True," she murmured as she stood up from the bed with a groan.

Her muscles had gone sore with the unfamiliar exertion she had put them through earlier in the day. She was hoping a warm shower would fix that.

"Sore?" Max asked as she plopped down on the bed across from hers.

She went to nod in answer, but the loud thud resounding from across the room had her stopping short.

"What the fu\*k?" The redhead cursed out, pushing off the bed frustratedly.

A few more colourful phrases left the girl's mouth as they both stared, astonished, at the broken piece of furniture bent around the front, just a few centimetres above the ground.

And really, what the fu\*k?

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That is how they both found themselves trudging beside each other in the quiet hallway some time near twelve in the morning.

The pin drop silence made her uneasy and she suddenly understood why some people really despised the quiet.

It was unnerving, especially when walking really late in the morning in a hallway that seemed to not end at all somewhere she had never been to before or knew nothing about.

She had seen and felt worse, but that 'worse' had always included noise, too damned much of it.

She moved a bit closer to Max unconsciously as she folded her arms.

"I don't like this," the words flew past her lips before her mind could even register what or more importantly *who* she was saying them to.

The redhead glanced at her, her eyes clear of any skepticism she had expected to see.

"Same," the girl mumbled as she pushed a long strand of red out of her face.

They were both in the midst of turning the stairs when she felt a tickle on her nose and sneezed.

"What the hell kind of noise was that?" The redhead frowned at her.

She scrunched up her eyebrows in confusion. "I sneezed..?" she said a little unsurely.

"That was *not* a sneeze," Max denied, looking an in between of amused and weirded out.

"What's that supposed to mean?" she chafed, feeling irritation start to prickle within her chest.

"That was just weird and you know it," the redhead said in a matter-of-fact voice.

"You know what?" she let out exasperatedly. "You can go to the reception by yourself."

She turned around in the hallway to head back to the room, before Max's hand shot out and grabbed her elbow.

"No! I meant weird is– uh, awesome!"

"Oh, is that so? How come it *wasn't* a second ago?" she asked rhetorically as she looked down pointedly at the girl's rather warm hand on her elbow.

The redhead's eyes followed hers and she pulled her hand back when she realised.

"No, look. I uh–" Max paused a bit stutteringly.

She hadn't seen the redhead do so before in all of the time that she had known her. The girl was usually unwavering with quick witty comebacks always sitting on the tip of her tongue, ready to be sputtered out at the smallest of opportunity and despite this, she managed to stare the girl down with an unimpressed look on her face.

The redhead stared back for a few seconds before sighing audibly. "Fine, I– I'm *sorry*," she said, the words slipping past her lips as though they foreign to her.

She almost snorted at the thought, knowing it wasn't far from the truth and decided against giving Max an answer.

The girl made an intangible noise at the back of throat that almost sounded like a sputter at her lack of response, "Come on, I said what you wanted to hear!"

She raised an eyebrow at the redhead's words before her eyes narrowed. This girl really did not know how to help her case. "If you think I'm going to go all the way down three exhausting flights of stairs when you talk to me like *that*, get another head."

"Fu\*k.. Okay– please? My bed literally *broke* just as I was going to sleep and all I want to do is *just sleep*. Please, *please* have some mercy?"

She fixed the girl with a long gauging stare before deciding Max wasn't entirely tactless and had gone through enough miserableness for one day and nodded a little curtly.

The redhead breathed an audible sigh of relief at that before they both got to moving again.

Her legs ached more than they had been an hour ago by the time they reached the reception.

The receptionist, a man in his mid thirties looking as though he had given up on life a long time ago, gave them both a curious stare as they made their way towards the desk.

She stopped behind Max as the girl went on to explain what had happened.

The man's reply only furthered the frustration she felt as she ignored the urge to stomp. "I'm sorry, missus. There's nothing that can be arranged until the morning except for a sleeping bag."

They had climbed all those stairs down for nothing. She rolled her eyes when the receptionist left to get Max a sleeping bag and they both waited impatiently in the now empty reception with Max's face reflecting the annoyance she was feeling.

Sleep was tugging at her eyelids and she yawned when the man



finally came back with one. They both left as soon as Max took ahold of the bag, dragging their tired selves up the dreadful flight of stairs. They were almost on the second one when the previously fine lightbulb in front of them flickered, stilling their sloppy movements.

"El.. was that you?" Max asked, suddenly looking a lot less sleepier. "Please say yes," she added thoughtfully.

"I would love to, but no," she glared at the object.

It flickered once more before stopping, but then the one towards the rooms started doing the same, making the hallway feel eerier than it had before.

"Okay.. now that one's flickering. How fast can you run up the stairs?" Max asked, taking her hand as they moved past the bulb that had stopped flickering.

"Given the situation, really fast," she muttered before they both made a sprint for it, stumbling at times, but never fully stopping until they were in the safety of their room.

"God, that wasn't my proudest moment," the redhead let out in between gasps as she shut the door behind her and they let go of each other's hands.

She gasped as her heart continued to thrum loudly inside her chest, "Ditto."

They both stared at each other in silence, catching their breaths before bursting into laughter.

"Let's never tell the boys. They won't ever let us live it down," she suggested in between laughter.

"Personally, I think we did better than them," Max grinned through a chortle.

She grinned back at the girl, lifting her hand up as if taking an oath before moving towards the bed.

"You're such a weirdo," Max jabbed playfully.

"At least, I'm not you," she smirked as she laid down on her bed, a little carefully without even realising.

Max laid out the her makeshift bed on the ground as she stuffed her face into the pillow, drawing the cool duvet over her body.

"Night El," the redhead whispered, lying down in her sleeping bag with apparent unease.

"Night," she turned the bedside lamp off, burying deeper into the cool covers.

She was really glad she had chosen the window side.

...

The feeling of someone shaking her shoulder roused her from her peaceful slumber as she woke up groggily, rubbing at her eyes.

"You take forever to wake up," Max whispered from somewhere near her.

"Do you temporarily die or something?"

She opened her eyes at the redhead's voice, letting them settle to the darkness before looking up at Max who was hovering over her.

"What do you want?" she asked in a croaky voice.

"A bug bit me," the girl replied.

She felt irritation prickle at her at the words wondering why the girl had woken *her* up.

"Newsflash. Want me to call you an ambulance?" she scowled.

"You try sleeping on the floor with bugs all over and we'll talk," the redhead seethed.

"Says the girl who broke the frigging bed," she retorted with annoyance.

"Are you saying it was my fault?" the girl's voice took on a higher

pitch.

"Well it certainly couldn't have been. Michael Myers or the bathroom ghost," she turned her back to the girl, pulling the covers over her head with the intention of ignoring said girl and going back to sleep.

She just wanted to sleep. Was that too much to ask for?

Of course, it was because the next thing she heard was a loud thud similar to the one before. She pulled the cover off of her head, sitting up in the bed tiredly.

*Thump.*

"Max, what are you doing?!"

*Thump.*

"I'm making it—" groan of effort, "my fault."

...

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Almost every chapter in this book ends on a cliffhanger.

I hate them a lot, but writing them is so fun mwahaha (that's an evil laugh, btw.)

Please review and tell me what you think!! They keep me going!!

### **3. iii. midnight tantrums**

#### **Summary for the Chapter:**

"We're not complete strangers."

"Give me one reason why not." He fired back challengingly.

"Well, I know her birthday. And.. her favourite colour. And uh, and we're sharing a bed!"

"What!?"

#### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Giving you all an onslaught of updates to make up for the wait, it's been forever and I'm sorry, I was kind of not well. This chapter's slightly longer and I hope you guys like it because more drama is coming!

"Are you for real?"

She got no response, but a rather loud thump that spurred her out of the bed.

"You're going to wake every one in this dammed hotel up!" She tried to keep her voice low which wasn't of much use because of the commotion Max was making.

"Fantastic. And then we can all have a slumber party with the frigging bugs!" Max griped as she kicked at bed, trying to damage the already broken wood more.

"Are you crazy!?" She raised her voice, almost thinking of using her powers to stop the hotheaded girl.

"I'm not crazy, I just hate this overpriced bullshit!" The girl yelled back as she flipped the thin mattress over.

"Overpriced bullshit?" She frowned.

"Oh, of course, you wouldn't know. You're the Chief's daughter." The redhead laughed humorlessly as she threw a pillow away.

"Is there something you're trying to say?" She glared at the back of the girl's head, folding her arms. She was having trouble believing this was happening in actuality. She had never seen someone as old as Max be as immature.

"I mowed Humphrey's lawn every day for five fucking months to pay for this. For *this*!" Max yelled out, frustratedly, trying to flip the bed over.

"Stop throwing a tantrum!" Her voice bordered on a shout.

Maybe Stacey and Marla hadn't been such bad options. At least they weren't likely to throw fits in the middle of the night.

"Go back to sleep, princess." Max's voice came out hard before muttering more to her own self than her. "I can't believe I ditched Dad for this."

She heard it nonetheless and paused, thinking there was more to the girl's frustration than a broken bed.

"What was that?" She stepped towards the girl with a frown.

"Nothing." Max called back stiffly, not bringing her frenzied movements to a halt.

She stared at the girl's back, closing her eyes when another thump echoed throughout the room.

"Okay, okay look--." She scratched her brow, trying to approach the crazed redhead differently. "Just calm down, please."

Nothing, but continued racket.

"Max, we'll do something about the bed, come on." She pleaded miserably.

The redhead paused as she looked at her dubiously with her eyes narrowed. "And the bugs?"

She heaved a sigh of frustration. "We'll do something about the bugs too."

And finally the redhead stopped making a ruckus as she plopped onto the broken bed with a slouch. The wood gave away a little more, creaking obnoxiously and making the girl recoil.

"What are we going to do?" Max fixed her with a skeptical stare as she scratched at her arm.

"Well, for starters, you shouldn't do that." She pointed at the girl's reddened arm.

"Stop treating me like a child." The redhead muttered disapprovingly all the while glaring at the broken bed and then at her.

"Stop acting like one." She retorted as she trudged back to her bed with Max following.

"God, all I'd wanted to do was sleep," The redhead said out loud, sounding as though she was going to burst into tears the next second which didn't really seem like a possibility to her because the redhead was nothing besides resolute. She sometimes disliked that about the other girl because even she had her bad days where she didn't bother keeping her head high and a good cry did her good on those days. Sometimes strong was exhausting.

Max plopped beside her on the bed, rousing her from her thoughts and still scratching away at her hand.

She stared at the girl tiredly, before sighing irritably and slapping the redhead's hand away. "Let me see that."

Not waiting for the girl's consent she pulled Max's shirt's sleeve all the way up to her elbow, taking the girl's slender palm in her own and not being able to help, but notice how soft Max's skin was, just like it had been when she'd mistakenly taken the girl's hand, as she inspected the sting. It seemed as though the more the redhead scratched at it, the more it grew in size. She shook her head slightly before digging in a nail into the bump, making an 'X' like shape in the inflamed skin before she spat on it.

"Did you just-."

"Saliva's antiseptic." She muttered as she pulled away.

"I- I know, I just.. prefer my own, you know?" Max cleared her throat, rubbing her arm uncomfortably.

"Too late." She drawled, suppressing a yawn as she gave her bed a once over, her sluggish mind barely comprehending what she was going through with, but there wasn't much else they could do.

"Listen, just bunk in with me for tonight. We'll figure something else out in the morning." She climbed into her bed, scooting over to give the other girl some space.

The redhead's only answer was a barely audible okay before she climbed in behind, setting one of the pillows in between them.

And then another.

"Wh-what are you doing?" She rubbed at her eyes as she pushed up on a single elbow.

"I kick around in my sleep." Max clarified as she adjusted the pillows.

"How do *you* know you kick around in your sleep?" She frowned with confusion, looking at the girl dubiously.

"Will told me." The girl answered causally before freezing up.

She processed what the girl had just said, her eyes widening considerably when her groggy mind finally understood.

"Will.. Oh my god!" She stared at the redhead, unbelievably.

How had she never noticed that?

"Not like *that*!" Max yelled back disgustedly.

"I really *really* don't want to know." She turned her back to the girl, putting an end to their bickering as she finally closed her eyes with a sigh of content escaping her lips.

The bed had been spacious enough when she had been the only one sleeping in it, but it wasn't anymore with her back pressed against the pillow Max had set in between them. She was too tired to care, however and lost herself in a dreamless sleep soon enough.

...

The next morning, she opened her eyes to the sun shining directly in them, making her groan as she brought one numb arm over her eyes, only looking up when a door opened and she realised Max was already up and about.

"You're such a heavy sleeper, you know?" The girl called out as she skidded past the bed towards her suitcase.

She raised her eyebrows in question, too tired to muster a reply as her eyes followed the redhead.

"Lucas was banging at the door like thunder and you didn't move an inch." The redhead reproved as she pulled her long waves up in a bun.

"What did he want?" She sighed out, sitting up in the bed with slouched shoulders.

"Oh, nothing important. We're just sort of on our annual senior trip and the teachers need us down—" The redhead glanced at her wrist watch mid-sentence before continuing— "in the span of fifteen minutes."

She stared back at the redhead lazily wondering what the rush was about.

"You really don't remember?" Max asked.

"What?"

"To incite punctuality, we'll be surcharging tho—" The redhead started in a false deep voice that sounded a lot like their Chemistry professor.

Her eyes widened when she caught on what the gibberish coming out of the other girl's mouth actually meant as she sprung off of the bed



in a frenzy.

She might be the Chief's daughter, but there was no way she would waste 5 dollars on being late out of all things.

"What didn't you wake me up?!!" She yelled at the redhead as she slid her feet into her slippers.

The girl only snorted in answer, looking at her with unconcealed amusement. "Because I'm not an alarm clock? Also, I tried and you clawed at me like a fucking cat."

"Fifteen minutes is not early enough time for a shower." She continued, making a beeline for the washroom.

"Glad you can do the maths!" Came the redhead's voice through the door as she closed it.

It wasn't until she was done taking an extremely short shower that she realised she had forgotten to bring in her bathrobe

"MAX!" She called out, waiting in silence for an answer.

"Yeah?" The girl called back.

"I uh forgot my robe!" She yelled out hesitantly.

"Oh, good job! Friendly reminder, we have to be down in five!" The redhead shouted back in a sing song voice.

"Could you at least give me a towel!?" She screeched frustratedly, trying not to let the other girl's childishness irk her up again.

She got no response and went to ask again when the door thudded. The redhead's hand came through upon opening it. She took the towel from the girl's hand, muttering a small 'thanks' before closing the door quickly when goosebumps started to rise on her skin.

"Don't make a habit of it." Max's murmur came through.

She wondered if she'd imagined the smile in the girl's voice.

They didn't say another word to each other afterwards except for her asking the girl to turn the other way so she could change. The redhead had obliged and taken the moment to refold clothes from her bag instead. She had found the sudden spark of perfectionism a bit odd, but shrugged it away.

Everyone had their quirks.

They were almost dying from the lack of oxygen by the time they reached the fields where every kid from their class was milling about, managing to make it there just in time before Mr. Landon could be at their necks for not being punctual enough.

"There they are." Max pointed off towards the buses.

And sure enough, she spotted four unmistakable figures leaning over one of the buses in the lot.

"Come on." She called out, making her way towards the boys with the girl right at her heels.

"You two are such girls! How do really spend so much time getting 'dressed up'?" Lucas scowled at the sight of them, air quoting his words grouchyly.

"Well, hello to you too, shithead." Max greeted, her face mimicking the look on his.

"For your information, Lucas, we are girls." She murmured with a soft glare.

"Boys and girls! Form a *disciplined* line, the lot of you!" Mr. Landon called out as students started to pile into a queue.

"Where are they taking us again?" She asked, suddenly remembering she hadn't gotten the chance to read the schedule.

"Well the schedule said 'a stroll of exploration', but in simpler words, just walking in the forest behind the hotel." Dustin replied, gesturing towards the vegetation as they all walked towards the other students.

"So basically, a boring walk with tress around, just another place

where I can't fucking skate?" Max rebutted languidly.

"Well, that's one way to put it." Lucas murmured in reply with amusement.

"I think by the time this week ends, your wheels are going to catch rust, Max." Mike smirked at the redhead.

"You ever say something good Wheeler?" The redhead scoffed out before trudging forward towards the lines. She chuckled at the girl's annoyance before giving the boys a wave and following.

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"I'll pay you hundred bucks if we so much as get a glimpse of one."

"Hundred actual bucks?" Dustin acquired with a grin.

Max rolled her eyes yet again, wondering why she had ever decided to walk in between the two.

"What, you don't think I will?" Lucas scowled at the curly haired boy.

"Well, it's just that you said that before, but I never got the money." Dustin rebutted as he readjusted his cap.

"That was one time, you asshole!" The darker skinned boy griped as he leaned over her to slap Dustin on the back of his head.

"Don't touch me!" Dustin barked when his cap almost fell off before he readjusted it again and glared at Lucas. "I don't trust you, which calls for a spit swear."

"You've got it, dude with trust issues." Lucas snapped as the two reached around her to carry out the disgusting mannerisms of said promise.

"Whoa, whoa, hold the heck on, misters!" She yelled as she stepped back with her hands raised up. "Do that somewhere else."

The two glanced at her with brimming annoyance before walking away, both muttering something under their breaths.

A sigh left her lips as she continued walking again with enthusiasm equivalent to the size of an ant, stuffing her hands into the pockets of her jeans and pondering over why she had really given into the temptation of going on a *school trip* -of all things- with her friends because with each passing day, it was proving to be torture rather than a source of enjoyment and on the top of that, only *two* days had passed. The thought made her want to drop dead onto the uneven ground. How was she going to endure five more days of hellish jaunt? The round-trip and excursion fare was weighing her down enough already, all that money wasted would just be a poisoned cherry on the tip of her rotten cake.

A hand sliding over her shoulders roused her from her brooding as she looked beside her, her eyes meeting Will's.

He gave her a comforting smile that she returned. "Where did the bickering couple go?"

"Bickering couple?" She acquired with confusion.

"They argue like they're married." He grinned suggestively.

She barked out a loud laugh before throwing her arm around his shoulder. "Your sense of humour is getting better day by day."

"Getting better? It's always been fabulous." He murmured with his nose crinkled.

She chuckled softly, shaking her head at him before sighing. "They're so alike, it doesn't make sense why they argue so much."

"Well, I could say the same about you and El." Will murmured with a teasing smirk, making her glare at him softly.

"Don't even start."

"Fineee." He gave in, dragging out the 'e' exasperatedly before glancing at her. "So, where are they?"

"They were betting whether there are snakes here or not and it came to the point of a spit swear so I sent them off." She elaborated as she searched past the trees for said boys.

"Snakes? What's wrong with these guys?" Will grumbled disapprovingly.

"Something terrible." She rasped before chuckling. "Where are the lovebirds?"

"Who?" Will frowned with puzzlement.

"Mike and Jane." She elaborated, her eyes still flitting around for any sign of camo pants or a capped head.

"Oh. Um, El saw this weird flower she wanted to... touch, I guess, so I thought I'd join you." He shrugged his shoulders, giving her another soft smile.

"That sounds like her." She murmured back.

It was just so much like Jane to stop by to observe a flower. She felt like she could almost imagine the intrigue on the girl's if she tried to. It had been three years since she'd known the other girl and if there was one thing Max knew for certain, it was that Jane always looked for something new to learn ever day, as though she had this undying thirst to know anything and everything about the world.

She liked that about the other girl a lot, her capability to find that *something* every single day.

"Do you think t-they're dating?" Will asked lowly, not meeting her eyes when she gave him a skeptical confused glance.

He wasn't the one to ever fish for gossip or poke his nose into other people's businesses.

"I don't know. I mean, Jane doesn't exactly come bounding over to me to gush about her love life." She chuckled dryly, picturing what a sight it would be if that actually happened.

Will made an incoherent sound that almost sounded like a sputter before giving looking at her softly. She stared back at him before sighing. "What's that look for?"

"You know you can call her El." He murmured with a light nudge.

"And don't say you can't because she's never asked you to. It's a shit excuse." He added with mild frustration.

"It's not an excuse." She retorted, letting her arm drop from his shoulder to lessen the ache starting to rise in her elbow.

"It's so weird. It's been years and you guys are still like— complete strangers." He rolled his eyes, pulling his arm away too.

"We're not complete strangers." She mumbled, trying to mask the defensiveness in her voice.

"Give me one reason why not." He fired back challengingly.

"Well, I know her birthday. And.. her favourite colour. And uh, and we're sharing a bed!" She gushed out before her face warmed up with regret at the wild look Will was giving her, knowing what he was exactly thinking.

"What!?"

His expression suddenly reminded her of how Jane had looked at her a few hours ago as she tried to rephrase, stumbling over her words helplessly. "Not—it's not what it sounds like!"

Will mutely raised an eyebrow at her before the sound of Dustin's scream interrupted the two of them.

"SNAKEEEEE!!!!!"

Followed by a whine and then Lucas yelling, "God, why do you hate me so much?!"

"Guess someone won a bet." She chuckled before they both scurried past the bushes towards where the shouts had come from, only to find Dustin dusting off his dirty cap and Lucas looking on, as unimpressed as ever with his hands on his waist.

"I won the bet!" Dustin grinned, stating the obvious at the sight of her, all the while slapping away at his cap.

"And screamed like a girl." Lucas muttered sourly, mimicking a squeal

before he rolled his eyes.

"Don't insult girls, Lucas." She hissed, nudging him in the ribs.

"Hey!" He jumped away, rubbing at the sore spot.

"Pay up now." Dustin interrupted, patting Lucas on the shoulder to get his attention.

"The thing's dead!" Lucas scowled, glancing at her and Will for support.

"A snake is a snake! Dead or alive, you sting!" Dustin argued before adding. "Good thing to have trust issues now, huh?"

"Whatever. Buy a less *dustier* cap with this." Lucas muttered, fishing the money out of his pocket and dropping it in Dustin's awaiting palm before grinning at her and Will. "Dustier—" he air quoted— "get it?"

"Oh yeah, really funny." Dustin retorted with annoyance.

She rolled her eyes at the two boys before rubbing away at her throbbing temple.

She really had paid all that money for nothing.

"What is going on?" A voice called out from a few steps away.

She looked up to see Miss. Mallory glaring at the four of them and cleared her throat. "Absolutely nothing, ma'am."

The teacher gave them all a disbelieving scrutinising stare before motioning for them to get moving.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Well, there we go!! What do you guys think? I would love to know your feedback and thoughts because I swear I get 10X more productive!!!

## 4. iv. defying gravity

### Summary for the Chapter:

"You're probably the heaviest thing I've ever picked up."

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"Are you calling me fat?"

### Notes for the Chapter:

Hey, guys! Here's another chapter and just a little warning, creepy will get creepier after this! Also, a big THANK YOU to all who left kudos and reviews on the last chapter!

"Today was absolute crap."

It wasn't an opinion, but something along the lines of a universal truth when the words left Mike's mouth.

"Well, I beg to differ. I earned hundred bucks so it wasn't that bad, you know?" Dustin grinned, winking at Lucas when the boy rolled his eyes.

"Shut up, Dustbin."

"Max, why are you always a kil--wait, what did you call me?"

Jane snickered from beside her, a hand over her mouth and she couldn't help, but feel pride bloom in her chest for some reason before frowning, what was wrong with her?

"Whatever. I had fun." Dustin glared at her with a shrug.

"Not the kind of 'exploring' I had in mind, really." Lucas air quoted as he threw the small stick clutched in his hand into a nearby bush.



None of them bothered to murmur any disagreement because it was all written on their faces too clearly and she would have found that interestingly amusing had she not been so done with the day.

And so, she wasn't looking forward to doing anything besides lazing around their designated rooms until sleep came around, calling her name.

Both, her and Jane had only just settled down in the bed that was only meant for one person with her filling in the 'madrid' on her skateboard using an electric blue sharpie while Jane, beside her, was flipping through a magazine that if she dared judge by it's cover, screamed of boredom. She pursed her lips, glancing down at her watch and only managing to become more annoyed when she saw the smaller hand was still on 10. Her heart was yearning to feel the air whip through her hair and flip her board down cracky pavements and feel the familiar ache in her knees that she was used to having by the end of every day, sometimes even a scarped knee or palm, it didn't matter.

She would take a bleeding palm any day over not being able to skate at all, over not having a proper bed or generally, just not a good time, perhaps not even a life, but maybe she was exaggerating that bit a little; which was perfectly okay because at least she wasn't the one going over the bounds of reason. No, that was the four boys standing below her window which she only came to know when a small thud resounded from the window, making her pause before she exchanged a confused glance with Jane, getting up with an exasperated sigh when something hit the pane once more. She walked over, ignoring the déjà vu she felt from doing the same thing so many times before, and pulled the window down, only to miss getting hit by another oncoming pebble.

"Hey, watch it!" She shouted at Lucas, grinding her teeth when the boy quickly raised a finger to his lips, before grasping the lobes of his ears as an apology.

With a purse of lips, she huffed and nodded before gesturing for him to tell what he wanted.

Dustin from beside him wordlessly raised up a bottle in answer, making her squint her eyes before she realised it was actually liquor.

She raised up a curious eyebrow, wondering how the boy had managed to sneak that in. He somehow managed to see that in the dark of the night and only grinned smugly in return before gesturing towards the tree and then for her to climb it down.

Actually climb it down.

"No way."

She jumped at the sound of Jane's murmur, suddenly realising the girl had been standing behind and peering over her shoulder all along.

"Yeah." She cleared her throat. "I mean, no." Her eyebrows scrunched when she realised she didn't make sense, not even to her own self. "I mean, that's not happening."

Jane frowned at her, with a hint of smile playing on her lips before nodding her head and turning it back to look down at the four boys standing below.

She closed her eyes, puffing out a breath and wondering why she couldn't find the right words when she needed them before following Jane's gaze to see Mike and Lucas waving at them to get their attention.

"What?" She yelled at him, making the four boys jump before they all put their fingers on their lips with squinted eyes, pleading.

"The teachers are at the first floor, some sort of meeting." Mike mouthed lowly, *thrice* for both of them to hear and understand.

She looked at the airheads that her friends before shaking her head. "Well I don't have a death wish, not yet."

Her words didn't deter the boys as Dustin face palmed before murmuring. "Oh, come on." She glared down at four boys, wondering if they were already done chugging a bottle when they continued looking up at her and Jane expectantly, as though she was really going to throw herself three stories down if they so much as asked, just to get drunk. Maybe she would have, had she been that, but with a sober mind, there was no chance.

"No, just climb the stairs down the second floor and take a left an—"

"Just because I'm impulsive doesn't mean I'm also stupid." She cut Mike off with a glare because climbing down the second story using branches or drainage pipes did not eliminate the risk, which coincidentally was exactly something she intended to avoid because of how at odds she was with her luck lately.

"Let me finish!" He scowled before Dustin punched his shoulder and motioned for the boy to keep his voice down.

"Sorry. Take another left and you'll see this—"

"I said, I'm not doing it, night." She puffed out a breath of annoyance, raising up her middle finger with a shake of her head before pulling the window down and never seeing the hand that was resting there until Jane hissed and every light in their room flickered and it was a little too late.

Oh, that was definitely something she was good at.

"Oh, fuck— shit, sorry." She fumbled with the panels before pulling the window back up and only hearing a barely there whimper from the brunette who proceeded to fist a hand around her thumb, holding it there with her face scrunched up so obviously in pain.

"I didn't see your hand, I'm so sorry." She mumbled, brushing her hair away with her hands raised halfway up, not knowing what to do.

Jane only shook her head at her before whispering, "It's fine."

She stared at the girl's face, her eyebrows jotted together into a frown with her nose crinkled up, immediately knowing it wasn't.

"Bullshit." She called out, receiving a glare in return that made her close her eyes to rephrase.

"Um, I meant, I'm a shit medic, but I know warmth um helps."

"I'm fine." Jane rasped out as she let go of her thumb with an audible wince that was hard to ignore.

She cringed at sight of the reddened skin, feeling her face warm up at her idiocy and oh boy, was that guilt she was feeling?

"Uh, let me?" She murmured out, stretching her palm out as though she was asking the girl to dance, hoping she wouldn't have to ask again and miraculously, she didn't have to when Jane wordlessly brought her hurting thumb upward.

She didn't meet the girl's eyes as she wrapped the sleeve of her track jacket around Jane's thumb before doing the same with her fingers and blowing. Their eyes met somewhere in midst of if all and unlike all the other times, she didn't find it weird when she looked into them, instead it felt almost.. nice, but then, that was really weird. It was a very awkward few minutes later when she let go, meeting Jane's eye apologetically afterwards, but the girl only gave her a small lift of lips.

"Do you want to go down?" Jane blinked back at her with her brows creased together.

Her eyes almost bulged out of their sockets at the words before she jerked back with a sputter. "What?!"

The other girl looked at her with one eyebrow raised before nudging her head towards the window. "The boys."

"Oh. *Oh*." She sighed out, letting her shoulders sag before turning away from the brunette. "Y-yeah, I mean they're going to need their mother, right?"

She cleared her throat and let her hair curtain her face as she walked, already halfway towards the door and never seeing the smile that broke through Jane's lips.

They climbed the stairs down together, thankfully not running into any flickering bulbs with her wondering whether she had broken a record of awkwardness with her stuttering apologies.

Who knew, she might just have.

Jane's one hand was trailing over the railing while the other bumped into hers, making her pull hers away. She cursed herself out under

her breath, not liking how it felt as though she had touched a naked wire as she stepped back a little, just so the wild thoughts running through her head would stop getting triggered.

Why had Jane said those words? Why had she interpreted it like *that*? Because now she couldn't stop feeling *weird* about it.

She turned the corner of the railing with relief because the stairs were finally going to end when a hand grabbed her elbow, jerking her back.

"Wha—"

"Shush." Jane muttered and the hand she had been trying to avoid was covering her mouth with the other one pointing towards her far left where she realised all the teachers were gathered at, slouched into chairs.

With a frown, she wondered how the boys had managed to sneak past that because there was no way not to be seen, especially when only a few teachers had their backs to the two of them. She took in a breath, scrunching up her face when Jane's hand over her mouth proved to be a hindrance in doing so. A breath on her cheek made her suddenly realise just how uncomfortable she felt being so close to the other girl. They slept in the same bed with pillows in between for Goodness's sake and so, she peeked her tongue out, licking at the girl's palm who recoiled immediately. "Yuck, don't do that!" Jane whispered with a hush, the disgust dropping from her voice.

"Why? Prefer your own saliva?" She smirked at the girl, adding in a wink without even realising.

"You're disgusting." The girl muttered, rubbing her palm at the sleeve of her shirt and looking as though she was almost pouting. It reminded her of a small baby and her smirk dissolved into a smile at that before Jane raised an eyebrow at her and she realised she was staring at the other girl's face like some creep, making her clear her throat before she glanced towards the common room.

"I don't think we can uh sneak past that." She murmured, gesturing down the stairs and not meeting Jane's eyes.

The girl nodded, worrying her lip between her teeth before turning away as she climbed a few steps up. "I have an idea."

"Wait for me!" She whisper shouted, following the girl.

She wished she hadn't because what Jane had in mind made her realise just how much the boy's idiocy had worn off on the other girl.

Was she the only one immune to stupidity?

"Hopper's going to kill you."

"If he finds out." Jane muttered back before jumping up to reach the lock again.

"This is really stupid." She groaned, looking on as the brunette tried and once again failed to lodge the lock out of its place.

"Live a little, Max." Jane huffed out before slouching against the wall with a tired sigh.

"I'd rather live a little *longer*." She seethed, frustratedly pulling her waves up in a bun when a strand tickled her nose yet again.

"You're such a baby." Jane uttered, pushing off of the wall and turning to the window again.

"Babies are cute." She retorted with a roll of eyes.

"Well, you're an ugly baby." Jane muttered with another failed attempt to open the lock.

She glared at the girl with a clenched jaw before rolling her eyes again. "Would you stop hopping like a rabbit?"

"At least I'm not slouching on a wall like some loser." The brunette scowled before reaching for the lock again.

She groaned miserably as she pushed off of the wall wondering why they couldn't ever talk without it becoming an argument.

"Okay." She sighed to herself. "Okay, stop that's not working."

The other girl gave her another short lived glare before glancing at the window and heaving out a breath, folding her arms as she slouched against the wall with a frown.

She cleared her throat, staring up at the window and leaning a little over on the tip of her toes to peer outside, trying to gauge the distance in-between that was quite a bit too much for someone to land on their feet or even knees gracefully. She frowned and tried to work up a rough guesstimate of whether they were both going to break a bone or two that night before deciding it was ought to happen.

"I think we should just do a raincheck." She glanced at the brunette, hoping she could talk some sense into her before adding. "We can get drunk tomorrow."

"I don't drink." The brunette frowned at her, joining her to look out of the window.

"You don't?" She heard the unbelievability in her voice as she said the words.

Jane shook her head in answer before chuckling. "Everything would just go.. haywire if I did."

It suddenly clicked into her mind what the girl really meant. "OH! Right cause you can-" She pointed to her temple when the brunette smiled and nodded.

"Yeah-" before her smile faded with a sigh as she looked off into distance- "They're going to get drunk off their asses and get in trouble. I'm their designated 'don't be stupid'." Jane air quoted, glancing at her as she did so.

"That makes so much sense, I might get a hemorrhage." She muttered, only to for a set of brown eyes to glare at her again.

"If you don't want to come, that's fine. Just help me sneak out and then you can be on your merry way." Jane mumbled, moving away from the window.

"As you wish, mademoiselle." She muttered, giving the girl a sarcastic

smile before setting her eyes to the lodge.

"Right, just crouch on all four—" The girl murmured and she felt her throat go dry because there were better ways to say that and the mental image of that— goodness, no. She was not going to think about that.

"And I'll uh get the lock." There was a small frown on the girl's forehead as worried her lip between her teeth again, looking at her expectantly.

She tore her gaze away, looking into the girl's eyes and shuffling as she ran a hand through her hair. "D-don't say it like that."

"Say what like what?" Jane's brows scrunched up as she put a hand on her waist.

She groaned internally before scratching the back of her neck. "Like.. like um, nothing."

"Okay?"

"Hold on, why do I have to be the stool again?" She protested, changing the topic so her stomach would stop frigging squirming.

"I let you share the bed!" Jane rebutted, giving her another glare.

"That's not a plausible reason!"

"Don't let the bugs bite you tonight, then."

She gawked at the girl, contemplating whether she could really go through a night of lying awake on the floor. "You're such a—" Jane gave her another reprimanding glare, looking like a scolding mother and making her feel like a small child— "fine. Fuck you." She muttered, falling to her knees before her hands followed. Jane waited for her to adjust before stepping up on her back. It was the most uncomfortable she had ever felt as she kept her head down wondering if she was the only one feeling so awkward.

She felt Jane reach for the lock and did her best to carry the extra weight when the girl stood up on the tip of her toes, digging them



into her bag. "Ow!" She yelped, jerking at the unpleasant sensation. Jane in turn froze up, trying to balance herself. "Stop moving!"

"Stop doing that.. thing with your toes!" She muttered, moving a little to to adjust.

"Just let me try once more." The brunette mumbled, standing up on the tip of her toes again and making her squirm once more. "Ow! Dude, get off!" She yelled with a scowl that the other girl most likely didn't see.

"Look, just- I'll uh I'll heft you up!" She exclaimed, adjusting her knees a little only for Jane to wobble before huffing and jumping down from her back.

"You're completely useless." The girl insulted as she stood up with a groan, rubbing at the small of her back awkwardly to make the soreness go away before wiping some sheen off of her forehead.

"Whatever, just um.." She motioned for the girl to turn around, ignoring the awkward silence that had washed over the two of them.

Jane gave her another strict glare. "If I fall--"

"Oh, for fuck's sake, just turn. You fall, I fall, all right?" She muttered, rubbing her left ankle with her toe disapprovingly before straightening up.

The other girl turned around wordlessly with her arms out before she brought her arms around her lower waist. "Be quick, okay?" She murmured before she lifting the other girl up. Her knees locked and bucked with the unfamiliar pressure as she straightened up.

"You're probably the heaviest thing I've ever picked up." She whispered, looking on as the girl reached for the lock, this time easily with the added height, before pausing and glaring down at her.

Her eyes looked darker than they had a minute ago, almost seeming black with a little kohl under them that contrasted against her pale skin like sun shining through trees, suddenly making her wonder why she hadn't noticed before as she realised Jane was still glaring at her and frowned. "What?"

"Are you calling me fat?"

She sputtered, almost making both of them topple over before rebalancing and wondering how the other girl could ever think that because, in her opinion, Jane had the perfect body and all the right curves. She was sort of like the girl that could do both, not that she'd ever cared to notice or would tell the brunette that, no.

"I didn't say that!" She heaved out, groaning a little as she readjusted her arms around the girl.

"Sure sounded like it." Jane muttered disapprovingly.

"Can we fight later because I'm about to drop you!" She almost yelled, cringing at that before readjusting her quivering arms again.

The brunette took mercy on her, maybe realising that she'd been holding the girl up for longer than she could and finally unhooked the lock out of its place before nodding at her to put her down.

"Thank goodness." She murmured, slumping down the wall and wiping away at her forehead.

She looked up at the girl and they both stared at each other in silence that didn't feel as awkward anymore, just familiar when she murmured, "What now?"

"I need a little push."

"You're really going to jump?" Her voice came out unfamiliarly soft, laced with worry that she should've tried to mask, but Jane gave her an equally soft look before smirking. "I have something better in mind. Come on." The girl motioned, grabbing the window frame as she stood up.

She stood up, interlocking her fingers as the girl stepped on her palm and used the given momentum to heft herself up.

"Don't die." She whispered, leaning up on her toes just to make sure Jane wouldn't fall. The worry brimming in her chest wasn't familiar and it made her clench her jaw with annoyance, wondering she had started to care so much, but Jane really did have something better in

mind because she didn't fall flat on her face the moment the brunette jumped, no. Instead she pulled herself up the window with a little struggle, gawking at the sight of the girl as she gently floated through the air with her curls ruffling from the slight breeze of the night and her eyes full of mirth that was so clear to see even in the darkness and God dammit, even the blood dripping from Jane's nose wasn't enough to make the sight anything short of amazing. It suddenly clicked into her mind that she was actually looking at a wonder. How had she forgotten just what the other girl was exactly capable of?

She let out a breathy 'whoa' that got in the air when Jane landed on her feet, albeit a little wobbly before holding her head and falling to her knees. Her stomach churned as she frowned, opening her mouth to ask if the girl was okay, but a laugh cut her off before she could voice the words. And that was the first time she was really paying attention to someone's laugh, but how could she not when it sounded so full of life? She couldn't help, but hold her breath just to listen it more clearly before joining in.

"That was awesome!" She shouted, grinning when the girl looked up at the sound of her voice with an equally wide smile on her face.

And that was maybe the only decent amount of time she really did get out of the trip because nothing could have prepared her for all that happened afterwards.

Nothing.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Well, what do guys think will happen next? Liked it? No? Let me know your thoughts!! I love feedback! It helps me improve and I GET HAPPY. Also, I have finals next month so the updates will be slower than usual, which I'm already really sorry about, but I'll do my best to update it because I have this book drafted up to the end, it might end up being a little longer!

Sorry for the loooooong a/n.

## 5. v. tripping on skies

### Summary for the Chapter:

"Why are you doing this to me?!" Her voice came out hoarse, as though she had just woken from slumber.

"I'm trying to make you live a little."

"This isn't how you make people live! I feel like I'm dying!"

### Notes for the Chapter:

Warning: Mild underage drinking and swearing.

I'm really mad at myself as of moment and we're going to reach the climax next chapter. I hope you guys find this chapter as good as the others and thank you for the kudos and reviews. Always gotta be grateful, aye?

Jane looked up at the sound of her voice, nodding eagerly before grinning up at her. The moon was bathing her face in it's silvery glow and she couldn't help, but think the girl looked so much like an angel if she were ever to see one before shaking her head.

There were those dammed weird thoughts again.

"Yeah. Wanna try?" There was tiredness dripping from the girl's voice and yet it also carried a joyous lilt to it that she didn't know someone could feel whilst being tired. She only felt dead when she was exhausted, but then everyone was different. Her forehead scrunched up in negation before Jane had even finished her question because 1) there was no way she was going through what the girl just had, even thought her adventurous heart yearned to and 2) Jane might be someone she'd known for years, but she didn't trust the girl with her life.

In the midst of those thoughts of denial, she didn't realise her feet had already left the ground until her head bumped into the top of the window, bringing her back to her own self as she flailed her legs about, bewilderedly looking down at Jane when the girl let out a quite amused "Oops."

Her eyes widened when her mind finally caught on, kicking into over drive with her arms flailing unsteadily like a flightless bird as she glared down at the other girl who had apparently decided to lounge on the grass below, really really far below with an almost drunken grin on her lips.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" She kicked her arms and legs out, trying to grab onto the window, just anything to resist the magnetic pull that was driving her away from solid ground.

"Don't make it harder than it already is." Jane murmured as she floated past the window, her arms no longer able to grab at the panel.

"Put me down!" She yelled at the brunette, giving her a strong glare before realising just how far up she was; her stomach lurched unpleasantly at the sight as she averted her eyes back up. "Oh god, shit."

"Well, that's what I'm trying to do." Jane chuckled, sounding every bit amused and she would have found that nice had she not been floating through the air against her consent by a girl who, not two minutes ago had looked about ready to drop dead with exhaustion. The thought only managed to escalate her already thundering heart, turning her palms clammy even when the cold air of the night was chilly enough to give her goosebumps, especially at the altitude she was at.

Goodness, what if Jane really fainted? She cursed out a few colourful profanities, her over working mind only making the situation worse than it was and the worst part was, she didn't even know how to frigging pray.

The pull of Jane's mind increased on her, as did the distance between her and the window, only furthering her panic because there went

her only escape.

"Why are you doing this to me?!" Her voice came out hoarse, as though she had just woken from slumber and oh god, her heart only crawled further into her stomach, to the point of wanting to make her barf.

She tried not to dwell on that thought, because sometimes pondering over something too much only made it worse, only made it more real.

"I'm trying to make you live a little," Jane said through a laugh, only this time she didn't join the girl. She was in no place to laugh and she wouldn't have before either had she known Jane was going to inflict *such* cruelty upon her.

"This isn't how you make people *live*! I feel like I'm dying!" She growled out, not letting her eyes flit down towards the girl when her inside flipped uneasily at the slightest glimpse of it.

"Oh, boy.." The brunette muttered, not even bothering to have the decency to hide how amused she sounded and furthering her annoyance. "Calm down, all right? Just.. relax!"

"Oh, thanks! I'm fucking cured!" She shouted back.

Everything just felt so far away and out of her reach. She directed her gaze to the sky, managing to only feel worse when she felt so small under its vastness. She couldn't look towards the ground, or the sky and there was absolutely no way she was going to close her eyes; closing her eyes would only intensify her bubbling panic ten times more.

She was dying.

"Hey, look you're almost done." Jane's voice broke her mind out of the jumbled mess it had fallen in.

"I don't think you're in the position to make me feel better."

"What, you want me to let you go?" The girl drawled teasingly.

She closed her eyes with a groan, opening them right afterwards

when her insides jostled, wishing she could strangle the brunette, if only her feet were on the frigging ground.

"Just shut the fuck up." She growled through clenched teeth, fisting her hands and ignoring the ache in her arms that were still stretched outwards as though they were a pair of wings, only they weren't.

She wondered how birds flew without dying from panic, but on top of that, how had Jane done it, looking every bit of graceful and free as she had flawlessly levitated through the air?

Something tickled at her feet, making her recoil before she was falling. She was thankful for the dryness of her throat that never gave voice to the squeal that most definitely slipped past her lips when her knees hit the grass, the gravity she had been revolting against finally pulling her down as she fell onto the grass and rested against the uncomfortable texture with no care in the world.

She was on the ground, solid beneath her and and there, right under her palms. Thank goodness, it was finally there.

Something thudded so close to her ears, interrupting the ragged breaths puffing past her mouth as she lazily lifted her head up a little to see Jane lying flat on her back beside her with droopy eyes and a tissue, stained red, in her hand.

"Don't your dare fucking faint." She whispered harshly, glaring at the girl who wordlessly nodded with a smile plastered to her lips despite how faint she looked.

In her relieved exhaustion, she couldn't bring herself to be mad at the brunette, too tired to even so much as curse her out, but she reckoned she had done quite enough of that on her way down.

She pulled her face up from the grassy ground, rubbing her cheek to soothe away the weird sensation as she turned onto her back, squirming a little when the pointy strands of grass prickled at her skin.

Lying flat on her back under a starry sky with Jane right beside her really was not as romantic as it might have seemed to an onlooker.

"Are you afraid of heights?" Jane rasped out a few moments later, breaking her train of thoughts and the peaceful silence they were both basking in, with only the sound of crickets keeping them accompany.

"No." She scowled immediately, ignoring the frowned glance Jane gave her as she stared up at the sky that seemed to be a mixture of navy blue and black. Looking at it with her feet on the ground felt so much better. She hadn't been able to appreciate it before, but there were more stars she could see than she ever before had in Hawkins, constellations that she couldn't name, but definitely see, sprinkled across the clouds and standing apart so brightly, some shinier than the others, but each equally beautiful.

"Why do you do that?" It was a soft murmur with a kind of lightness behind it that she hadn't ever heard in Jane's voice before.

The tenderness almost made her want to curl her toes which she blamed on the starry sky above her and the adrenaline still running through her veins, making her stomach flutter oddly as she swallowed, only to realise how dry her throat had turned.

She needed a drink. "Do what?"

She didn't know why they were both murmuring, but it just felt like one those things she felt like she should do, in the dead of the night with no blandly painted ceiling above them to shroud the sky from their eyes and absolutely no bugs to bother her or Jane, even when the two of them were laid on their backs in grass.

It just felt *right*.

"Pretend to be strong." There was that softness in the other girl's voice again, erasing any sarcastic remarks that might have been waiting to slip past her lips and breaking down her defense mechanism with just one tender blow.

She swallowed against the dryness in her throat again, her eyes glued to the sky as she actually considered Jane's question. It wasn't something she had ever been asked before which made her stomach swirl with unease, making her smile a little as she realised just how in sync her body was with her thoughts and feelings.



"It's just... how I've always been." She frowned with pursed lips because she really didn't know how to give Jane a logical, comprehensible answer.

She raised up an eyebrow when the brunette let out a chortle from beside her.

"You're doing it again." The girl gave her a long gauging stare, not looking away even when she was done saying the words.

Something in her grounded her from looking away too, much like the magnetic pull from earlier on, not letting her avert her eyes even when she desperately wanted to because it felt as though Jane was looking through her. The feeling was unfamiliar and she had learnt after years of things not going right to fear the unknown.

She knew she should've looked away, but somehow didn't have the strength to because it felt like the first time she was actually talking to El instead of Jane and the realisation washed over her like never seizing raindrops, something she didn't know how to exactly comprehend because this wasn't their usual.

Their usual was either not talking or arguing to the brink of exhaustion, not looking into each other's eyes and talking about how she protected herself from the world under a pretty night sky.

Their usual was not in a blasted chance, romantic.

"Noi! Someone's dead!" It was a different voice that made both her and Jane jump as she lifted her head up, trying not to be seen and simultaneously, trying to see the owner of the voice. Another incoherent shout sounded off, the slurring in the words hard to ignore as she pushed off of the ground a little.

"Wait, there are twlo!"

She frowned, wondering what the heck were the people on about before realising the voices sounded so familiar.

"And they're.. moving?"

Her eyes widened then, as she stood up on her legs, staggering a little when blood rushed to her head with Jane following.

"Who's—"

"I can't believe we forgot about the boys." She groaned, seeing Jane's eyes widen.

And then they were both sprinting towards the two silhouettes in the dark of the night, just on the outskirts of the forest.

"Took you two long enough!" Will whisper yelled upon their arrival, sounding annoyed with slouched shoulders and yet relived, all the while trying to steady a staggering Dustin in his arms.

"Willy, the dead are walking.. the night. Run." The drunk boy muttered, falling into Will's side that had the him stumbling.

She took pity on thin boy, with guilt swirling in her stomach and ignoring Dustin's drunken murmurings as she wounded his almost limp arm around her shoulder with Jane coming to her aid and supporting Dustin's weight as Will sighed in relief; giving her and Jane a small smile as he stretched his shoulders with a groan.

She grinded her teeth together, noticing just how disheveled the boy looked. "Sorry, we were uh— trying to sneak out."

"And it took you an hour?" His voice carried an incredulous lilt that was hard to ignore, along with the frown on his forehead.

"Yeah, someone had the fabulous idea to *jump* from a window." She muttered, getting reminded of the events of not too long ago as she glared at Jane who frowned before retorting back defensively. "Technically, we didn't jump."

"Are you two serious?"

Will's question went unheeded as she felt her temper start to shoot up and seethed at the brunette. " Oh yeah, no. We *flew*."

Jane's jaw clenched visibly before the girl tore her eyes away, ignoring her as she directed her gaze to Will instead, who sounded and looked excessively off put. "How did you guys sneak out?"

"Through the fire exit?" He murmured, glancing at the two of them

before considerately turning his flashlight on when she stumbled over the uneven ground.

"There is a fire exit?" She scowled breathlessly, nudging Dustin's head to keep him awake. She was so tired, having just burnt at least a hundred calories just a while ago.

"Almost every building has one, Max." Will sighed out and with that she was back to glaring at Jane because she had just gone through so much trouble when it could've been avoided. It just really irked her when she learned only after already having done something to realise that it could've been done much much more easily, with half the amount of trouble.

Her musings were broken off by the sound of leaves crunching that had her pausing along with Will and Jane, when the brunette whispered. "Will, where are Mike and Lucas?"

And it suddenly clicked into her mind that *that* question should've crossed their minds and been voiced minutes ago, but the creepy sound of footsteps only drew louder until Mike came staggering past some bushes with an arm around Lucas who was nursing an almost empty bottle of whiskey, both boys unsteady on their feet, making her tense muscles relax.

She couldn't help, but think they were the most numb headed idiots, lurking around in a forest at night, *drunk*.

"You scared the shi—

The taller boy seemed to notice them then, his unfocused eyes considerably widening before he put a finger to his lips and whispered. "Shhh. We're being.. watched."

His words washed over her and Dustin's weight on her suddenly felt a lot more heavier as everything suddenly felt a hundred times more out of place with her instincts kicking in, making their surroundings feel creepier than they had a moment ago as she realised almost all of them were drunk with a forest right behind them, inhibiting who knew what kind of horrors and Sylvans she wished not to run into.

"What? Did you see some one?" It was Will who recovered first, trudging forwards to pull Lucas and Mike towards the three of them with shaky concern dripping from his voice.

"Mike, answer us." She glanced at Jane to see the brunette worrying her lips with her eyes hard and set in focus and goodness was she grateful for the girl's existence then.

Mike narrowed his eyes at them in his drunken stupor before shaking his head and laughing, only managing to look more like a maniac she was starting to believe he was. "God's watching, you all."

"Someone please shut him up before I knock out his drunken ass." She griped, clenching her jaw and almost trudging forward to slap the stupid drunken look on the boy's face as he made a face at her before pinching Will's nose and murmuring, "Got you."

She rolled her eyes at his words, heaving when Jane left Dustin's side to help Lucas and she had to drag the boy along alone.

"We can't go up, can we?" She voiced the question, stalling beside the wall of the hotel and feeling much better since they weren't exactly in or near the forest anymore.

Will looked up before frowning, contemplating her question and shaking his head as he lowered Mike to the ground, as best as he could.

She did the same with Jane following as they all let out relieved breaths, letting the three drunk boys lay beside one another and snore off.

"You got some water?" She slid down the wall, running a hand over her forehead.

"Why would I?" Jane murmured back, making her groan before she shook her head. "I asked Will."

The boy looked up at the sound of his name, in the midst of turning Lucas on his side with the whiskey bottle in his hand that she immediately snagged off.

The only thought that passed through her head was relief when the strong liquid went down her throat as she hastily chugged it down, letting it burn her throat, but soothe her thirst.

"Hey, go easy." Jane nudged her, making her pause before she pulled the bottle away from her lips, only to realise she had downed all of it in one go. She coughed a little, clearing her throat before adjusting against the uncomfortable wall and wishing she had, at least, brought her sleeping bag that had never before seemed useful up until that moment.

"Today was stupid." She rasped out as she threw her head back and closed her eyes.

"Really stupid." Jane whispered back through a yawn.

She felt the girl adjust beside her, before the sound of leaves crinkling stopped. "She admits!"

There was a pleasant warmth buzzing through her that made the nightly breeze feel pleasant as it whipped through her hair, letting loose a few strands out of her messy hair bun that tickled her nose.

"It was also hilarious." Jane murmured and she wondered when smiles became audible because she could hear the one in Jane's voice.

She opened her eyes to see for herself and no doubt, there it was. A soft dreamy smile with Jane's pearly whites shining through, just the tiniest bit. She felt like an intruder, as though the sight before her eyes wasn't something she was supposed to see. And in that moment, she really for the first time noticed, *realised* just how gorgeous Jane Hopper was, with her curls ruffling and her eyes closed and her lips stretched into an easy smile and the moon bathing her face with just the right amount of light. The brunette looked like life.

The thought made her frown because her tipsy mind could not comprehend how something could even look like life. Life wasn't a picture and life surely couldn't be a person, could it? She shook her head, stopping her train of thoughts. She was too tired for anything and everything and yet, she knew she was doing it again, the thing where she couldn't help but just stare, with something in her grateful that Jane had her eyes closed. There wasn't a smile on the girl's face any longer. She just looked like a waxwork figure, if wax statues

could look like they had life running through them whilst being still, if statues could look so serene even when they were made of cement, but how could statues look like Jane?

"You have a pretty smile." She didn't even know the words had left her mouth; she hadn't meant to say it out loud.

Jane's eyebrows crinkled up, making her hold her breath before the girl hummed drowsily and adjusted on the ground, stilling once again.

She let the breath she'd been holding go, turning on her side before her stupid mouth could voice any other of her thoughts. With a sigh, she let her gaze flit over the boys snoring atop one another. Her eyes started dropping with exhaustion as she yawned before finally closing them and never seeing the pair of one watching and watching.

Just  
staring.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Eh, could just be a cat or 'something,' heh.

I'm unsure about the ending and the note I left it on because it turns into a sort of omniscient pov, but I'm just going to roll with it OR SHOULD I CHANGE IT? Suggestions?

What do you guys think next chapter has in store??

Also, REVIEW?! Because they're the best part of my day!!!

## **6. vi. not your everyday scouts**

### **Summary for the Chapter:**

Her fingers came back tainted red.

And really, what the hell?

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

What's better than a really creepy chapter summary?!

An apology, duh.

Okay, so you guys. I am so so sorry for not updating in so long. I had exams and still have practicals and many writer's blocks. I hope this slightly longer chapter and Elmax interaction will make up for the due updates.

I know I said we'd hit the climax this chapter, but that kind of does not happen, not yet.

This story is going to be even longer than I thought.

And so, without further ado.. SCROLL!

She couldn't feel her legs..

but a dozen different kinds of aches in her body before the haze of grogginess even lifted from her mind. A part of her wanted to just lay there, as uncomfortable as she was, and ignore her cognizant brain that deemed it necessary to move out of the open.

In between that contemplation, something splashed against her eyelids, taking the last remnants of sleep away then and making her begrudgingly open them, only to feel more droplets of wetness hit her skin and soon enough, she came to her senses, realising it was drizzling.

She closed her eyes once again with an audible groan before reopening them and noticing right away how the sky was a dull pale blue.

Thankfully, there was no sun shining in her eyes and the slight morning breeze felt cooler on her skin than it usually did, bordering on being biting cold.

It was early, really early if the colour of the sky was anything to go by.

She might have stayed there –laid on her back beside the hotel, exactly where she had idiotically fallen asleep the previous night, but the prickling grass beneath her and it's pointy strands that dug into her back even through her hoodie were becoming more and more difficult to ignore and the drizzling had started to gradually pick up. Another ten minutes under and she was pretty sure she would be drenched to the bone.

And so, with another dramatic groan, she sat up. Or well, tried to.

Her eyebrows shot up in a confused frown when she couldn't, at least not all the way up and it was only then that she noticed the pair of legs thrown over her torso, making her remain in an awkward half sitting and slouched position.

And that was why she couldn't feel her own dammed legs.

She then understood why Max had been so adamant on putting pillows between the two of them. With a mildly unimpressed shake of head, she looked at the girl, for the first time seeing her sleeping because all the other times the redhead had somehow always managed to wake before her.

The sight that greeted her was whimsically comical enough to make her smile. The redhead lay sprawled on the grass, half spooning her torso with her hair spread out like a halo around her head, as wild as the girl herself.

She realised a second later that she was staring and tore her gaze away, getting distracted by the sound of leaves crinkling. Her gaze drifted past Max to see Will sitting up and trying to wake the other three boys who were momentarily dead to the world even though the



drizzling could not longer be called that.

She shook Max's legs, hearing what could only be described as an annoyed groan from the redhead. The girl showed no signs of moving away anytime soon and so, with no other option, she hefted the girl's legs off of her own, successfully rousing the redhead up in doing so.

With a relived sigh, she rubbed at her calves, trying not to giggle and simultaneously cry over the tingles that shot up both of her legs.

Sleeping limbs.

A hitch in breathing pulled her away from her ministrations as she turned to give Max, who was now sitting upright, in the midst of pulling her hair up in a messy bun, a curious glance only for the girl to continue staring back at her with a rather heavy frown.

She stared back, raising an eyebrow when the redhead continued to, more or less, gawk at her. "What?"

Max paused in her blatant staring, blinking stiffly before looking away and clearing of throat which did nothing to lessen the sleep laden husk in her voice. "I- Why'd you do that to your face?"

She raised both her eyebrows then, thoroughly confused. "What's wrong with my face?"

Max's uncomfortable expression suddenly morphed into an annoyed one as the girl rolled her eyes. "I'm not stupid, okay? I can connect the dots."

The redhead's words did nothing besides confusing her even more. She went to ask the girl for a more articulate explanation when Lucas' voice interrupted the two of them, halting the words that were going to roll off her tongue.

"Hey, have you seen my Bandana?"

"Yes. Last night, on your head." Max huffed out, giving her an odd glance that she couldn't decipher the meaning of as the girl stood up and dusted her pants off.

"You're so helpful sometimes.." Lucas scowled before turning to her

and as he met her eyes, his own widened.

"What the hell?" He mumbled, glancing quizzically at Max and then back at her.

She took in their bewildered stares before lifting a hand and rubbing her wet cheek, deciding there had to be something on her face if the look on both Max and Lucas' face was anything to go by.

Her fingers came back tainted red.

And really, what the hell?

She could have easily mistaken the colour for blood, except for the fact that her face did not hurt in any way whatsoever.

Lucas and Max were still staring at her with identical frowns when she looked up at the two, fixing them with a scrutinising glare. "Is this a prank?"

Lucas was the first one to react, looking mildly affronted as his nose crinkled up in disbelief. "Oh come on, I just woke up!"

"And?" Max interrupted, tearing her attention away from the boy as the redhead gave him that familiar look of annoyance. "Seriously, where'd you even get the.." the girl paused, gesturing at her face with confusion– "..paint from?"

"You think I would go through all that trouble, just to draw some–" he gestured towards her face with knitted brows– "weird line on her face?"

She rolled her eyes with annoyance at the two, too tired to interfere as Max opened her mouth, most likely to say something affronting when Dustin miraculously bounded over, stalling the bickering between the two as he gave Lucas a rather hard pat on the back, the thump echoing in the stillness of the early hour.

"What do we have here?" She met his eyes, noticing his slouched shoulders and his usual cheerful persona, dull.

He greeted her with mildly blotched eyes, the puzzlement in his gaze

very evident.

Lucas winced, shrugging the curly haired boy off and glaring at him as he stepped away. "Why do you have to be so loud?"

Max snorted then, as she leaned down and picked up the empty liquor bottle from where it lay in the grass, beside her. "Well, if you think that's loud..."

"Just shut up. All of you." Lucas groaned out, rubbing at his temple.

She felt amusement flicker within her and smirked at how miserable he sounded, finally deciding to push herself off of the grass before her pants could get anymore dirtier from the wet soil, all the while ignoring the tingles that shot up her legs, courtesy of Max.

She really hated numb limbs, but smirked nonetheless. "You guys wanted to get drunk, now suffer."

"Yeah, thanks, El. You're so nice to us." Mike piped in from behind the two boys, making her look up as she dusted herself off, noticing him and Will who stood right beside the taller boy for the first time. Will –the only one who looked much more *alive* than the rest of the boys.

She couldn't hold in the smile that slipped past her lips at seeing their disheveled state, immediately wondering why any of them even thought of getting drunk in the first place and, if somehow that wasn't bad enough, they had slept in grass with all sorts of bugs and whatnot.

If Hopper ever found out.. she didn't even want to go there.

"Well, now that we're all up, how about we climb some stairs and sleep in *beds* that we left empty last night?" Max muttered, emphasising on the word with an annoyed lilt in her voice.

She shook her head and wondered how the girl managed to be so off put by the smallest of things 24/7, but the muscles in her neck ached with the slightest of movement and the the realisation suddenly dawned on her.

Yeah, that was how.

The boys all murmured intangible affirmations before they all drawled towards the hotel's entrance with little enthusiasm, making as little noise as they could.

Max, in the meantime, had the ingenious idea to get rid of the liquor bottle that she had picked up earlier.

The only problem with that being that the girl threw it over into the forest, making a splat! like noise echo as the bottle most likely broke from the impact.

She grimaced before giving the redhead a stern glare, wondering just how many laws the girl had just broken.

Max smirked in turn when she caught her gaze before imitating her from the previous night and –in her opinion– failing horribly (because that was most definitely not what she sounded like). "Live a little, Max."

She rolled her eyes at the girl's antics before turning to the hotel's entrance where they discreetly crept past a snoring receptionist and up the stairs.

"Hey, El?" Will called out when they reached the third flight, making her pause over the steps.

She gave him a side glance, asking the question mutely.

"You might want to.. clean up your face."

Suddenly remembering the issue from beforehand, she stopped and turned to the face them all, almost having Max run into her as she glanced at all five of her friends.

"About that–" she started– "who's responsible for this?" She gestured to her face, giving them all a blank look and immediately getting equally empty ones in return.

"Yikes." Dustin whispered with bewilderment and she noticed how the others did not look any different.

They all muttered a chorus of something along the lines of 'wasn't me' and she didn't know whether she believed them or not.

•

As soon as she reached her designated room alongside Max, the sight of the bed had her sighing in relief. The ache in her knees suddenly became tenfold more painful and she gave the restroom a brief glance, trying to contemplate whether she to go wash her face or catch a few more hours of sleep before they had to set out for another activity and well, she reckoned the bed just looked so much more appealing.

And so without another thought, she threw the covers back, burrowing into pillow and humming at the soft coolness of the sheet and the quilt that greeted her.

Had she ever mentioned how much she adored beds?

Just as she grew groggy and thought she was going to slip into slumber, the bed dipped beside her before a light weight came to rest just beside her torso.

She sighed, not even having to open her eyes to know that Max was lying beside her, undoubtedly with a pillow in between.

•

The next time she woke up, it was in a much better position and *place*.

She felt sufficiently better than before, with her backache almost nonexistent and the rest of her body void of any stiff muscles, however that happiness was short lived because as soon as she opened her eyes, she sneezed.

Once, then twice.

The noise was apparently loud enough to rouse the dead weight of Max from beside her who *—she had come to realise in the past few days—* was a light sleeper.

She was surprised, however, when she didn't even have to look beside her to know that the girl was glaring at her. "Again, what kind of noises were those?"

"Shut up." She sniffed, rubbing at her runny nose with mild annoyance.

Max snorted as she buried her head under the covers once more. "I'm just saying—" Came her muffled words from under the quilt— "it could be kind of cute if it wasn't so annoying, you know?"

She looked at where she supposed the girl's head was under the covers before smiling a small smile, because the girl was a little funny, she had to give her that, but most importantly because the redhead couldn't see.

Max's antics weren't even surprising anymore, the girl had just managed to compliment and insult her at the same time, the redhead was a mixture of hot and cold and she wondered just when she had gotten used to that.

"Yeah, well, you know what? I like you better when you're asleep. The quiet is peaceful."

"Sorry, all I heard was you saying you like me. And I don't blame you at all."

The girl's words had her pausing momentarily before she huffed - *intentionally* loud as she climbed out of the bed and trudged towards the en suite restroom, not giving Max a reply.

It wasn't until she entered the small space and sneezed once again that she caught sight of just how horrible she looked in the mirror before her.

Yes, she had been too tired and lazy before to wash her face, assuming if it was paint, she could take care of it later when she showered, but that was when she didn't know just how much of a.. *maniac* it made her look.

Max's reaction from earlier suddenly made a lot more sense. She definitely wasn't a sight one would want to wake up to.

Turning the tap up, she wetted her hand and dabbed at her face, frowning when she felt the roughness of the substance, paint and.. grime, perhaps?

There was an odd line of whatever the substance was streaked across both of her cheeks, drawn from the edge of her lips to those of her ears.

Her frown and confusion only grew heavier as she continued to clean her face, cleansing away what little streaks of the paint (?) had streaked down her jaws, most likely from the rain.

She heard footsteps and looked up in the mirror, seeing Max pausing at the door and meeting her eyes as she sighed. "Finally. I was wondering when you were going to realise that this wasn't funny at all."

"And you're back to not making sense." She mumbled tiredly before splashing her face with the slightly cool water.

"I should be the one saying that!"

She looked up in the mirror again as the water dribbled away from her eyes, only to see Max now scowling at her.

Hot and cold, once more.

"Max..-" she mumbled with exasperation before continuing- "could you please, for once, just be clear?"

"What, do I still not make sense?" Max's eyebrows twitched as she frowned. "Well, guess what? Neither do you. It was a stupid compliment, I was tipsy and.. I didn't even mean it."

She reckoned her frown matched the one on Max's face as she turned to face the girl, leaning on her elbows as she rested them on the edge of the sink.

"Compliment..? Okay, just what the hell are you talking about?" She asked for what seemed like the hundredth time, but this once with defeat in her voice.

She did not like being confused and somehow, Max almost always left her questioning everything.

The other girl opened her mouth with an even sour expression on her face before snapping it shut and searching her eyes until she stilled altogether, apparently coming to some sort of defeated conclusion. "It.. it wasn't you, was it?"

"You mean the whole..?" She trailed off, gesturing to her now clean face, free of the grimy substance as she shook her head in a silent answer.

Why on earth *-no*, why on any planet in the whole solar system would she smudge grime over her own face, much less for a prank?

Max nodded a little jerkily before sighing and frowning once again. "Then who drew that? If it wasn't you or the boys.. and it wasn't me either." The redhead mumbled, seeming to talk more to her own self than her.

"Drew what?" She questioned, her voice still thick with confusion.

What was she missing?

"That.. that stupid ear-to-ear smile on your face! It's like someone was.. listening or something. I don't know." Max clenched her jaw in obvious frustration, seeming to say more, but holding back.

She waited in silence, hoping the girl would elaborate further, but the explanation never came and knowing Max, it wouldn't.

With a quiet groan, she tipped her head back before meeting Max's eyes once more. "Okay, so someone drew a *grin* on my face..? With red paint while we were asleep?"

Max nodded as she shuffled, not adding anything as she shook her head. "Stupid frigging prank. It wasn't even funny." The tension gradually left the girl's shoulders as she turned away from the washroom's door, seemingly done with their conversation.

And once again, there she stood, still leaning on the sink, confused to the point of no end.



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In between packing her luggage and getting rid of her dirty jeans and jacket, she decided

Jane looked too confused to be playing her.

Yes, they didn't know each other well, but she knew when someone was lying.

And she had always known herself to be better at it than any of her friends.

Which was why, in the end, she decided to keep an eye on Dustin, Lucas and Mike, just in case one of them slipped or shot her a teasing smile when they thought she wasn't looking, only she would be.

Ignoring the still growing confused looks Jane sent her way every other minute, she zipped up the side pocket of her small suitcase before straightening up and looking behind her to check up on the brunette, only to see the other girl standing by her bed with a duffle bag slung over her shoulder and scrutinising her silently.

She ignored Jane's gaze once again, huffing out a small puff of air before walking over with her things to hand them over to the brunette. "Will they fit in?"

Jane sent her a small, if not mischievous, smile as she rolled her clothes into an impossibly small roll before shrugging the bag off of her shoulder and stuffing her things in. "Yeah, they'll fit right in."

She snorted at the girl, not holding in her chuckle before pointing to the bag. "And just add this bag to the list of another thing we've shared over this damned trip."

"More like things I've had to share with you." Jane jabbed with a huff that seemed forced.

She rolled her eyes before turning towards the door, not giving the small amused smile on her lips a single thought, nor the fact that they were both exchanging friendly banter without it ending in an argument.

"Whatever, let's get going before we end up having to share a seat too."

She heard Jane's spontaneous chuckle before the girl's footsteps followed hers.

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"Is it just me or does this seem far too easy?" She mumbled, uprighting another rod from the gear beside her.

She heard Jane's feet shuffle before the girl flopped beside their bags, giving her an unimpressed look. "We're doing it wrong, Max."

"We? Because from the looks of it, I'm the only one doing any kind of 'moving' over here." She rolled her eyes at the brunette when the rod she had just set up, toppled over on to the ground uselessly.

The sound of Jane's snort only annoyed her further before she swallowed her pride and gave up, letting herself fall back. "Okay, so, maybe we're doing it a little bit wrong."

"A little bit?" Jane called out with incredulity.

She closed her eyes, taking in a deep breath and trying not to fall back into the familiar habit of arguing with the brunette when the shrill noise of a whistle sounded out and someone called out for them.

It had surprised her when she didn't find herself too perplexed upon learning they were all going camping. In fact, she had almost felt excited by the aspect of setting up tents and building a bonfire in the safe zone of the forest a few miles from where they were staying.

Or she had thought, when an hour ago she hadn't been tasked with setting up a tent for two.

Now? Now, she wondered just why she hadn't dreaded this day.

"You coming?" Jane's voice brought her back to the situation at hand and she gave the girl a nod, springing to her feet before following the brunette towards the small lake where most of their supervising

teachers stood.

"All right, kids. I think, it's fair to say that most of you are, more or less, incapable at building tents.."

"No shit." She muttered, zoning the teacher out and turning to Jane instead, who seemed to be paying attention. "Where are the boys?"

The brunette frowned at her, shushing her as she shrugged her shoulders and turned her attention back to whatever their P.E teacher was saying. She couldn't help herself as she stared at the girl a little ridiculously for that.

Jane was such a nerd.

She was about to slip away and look for one of the boys herself as the crowd of students around her started to disperse when Jane took her hand, something akin determination in her step as she led both of them back to where their bags were.

"Um, okay?" She grumbled, letting the girl, quite literally, drag her away.

"Get to work, I know what to do," Jane said as she leaned over the camping gear and handed her a few metal rods.

"You do?" She didn't get a reply, only a brief nod before the brunette skipped over and started setting the rods up.

She stood there for a few seconds with brimming envy and awe when not a single rod tottered over before following Jane's directions.

In the end, it was her who sat by uselessly with bruised pride and a newfound respect for Jane, who managed to set the tent upright.

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"So, how did you really do it?" She asked as she fumbled with her sleeping bag, dragging it to one corner of the tent and leaving the other for Jane.

"Simple." The brunette remarked from where she stood by the tent's

entrance, sleeping bag in hand. "I paid attention."

She couldn't discern whether it was a taunt or the brunette was being practical, but decided not to question or protest, opting for silence this once.

She reckoned she should make that a habit. "But, um, it was.. cool."

Jane looked minutely astonished when she looked up at the girl, before clearing her throat and giving her *a* look.

A look that she couldn't comprehend.

"Did you just say something.. positive *without* a tinge of sarcasm?"

She blinked back at Jane with mild puzzlement, not seeing any sign of amusement in the girl's eyes, only surprise.

If it was a joke, she definitely did not feel humoured.

"Never mind,I said that." She mumbled, turning her attention back to clearing away space in the small tent for her things all the while wondering whether Jane had been exaggerating or joking.

She wasn't that bad, was she?

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### **Notes for the Chapter:**

There we go! I hope this wasn't a bummer! The next update will be here very soon, so don't worry, drama is coming and so will that climax!

I have a practical tomorrow and my invigilator literally hates everyone's guts, so wish me luck for that!

Also, let me know what your thoughts are! Your

feedback is most welcome and makes my day!!

(p.s: should I start dedications?! Or is it too late to ask that?)

**Author's Note:**

**p.s: Kudos and reviews make me so happy!!**